

THE TWENTIETH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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THE SOLEMNITY OF ST. BERNARD



- Sunday** **The Solemnity of St. Bernard, Doctor of the Church**
Aug 20 **Our Need for Conversion**
A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard
- Mon** **Memorial of St. Pope Pius X**
21 **How the Lord Feeds our Love**
A reflection highlighted by a sermon of
Thomas of Villanova
- Tues** **DAY FOR REMEMBRANCE OF THE DEAD**
22 **Learning Love for God & Praying for Our Dead**
A reflection excerpted from a sermon by Fr. Karl Rahner
- Wed** **Memorial of St. Rose of Lima**
23 **Trials & Transformation in Christ**
A reflection based on a Letter by St. Rose of Lima
- Thurs** **Feast of St. Bartholomew, Apostle**
24 **The Wisdom of the Guileless**
A reflection based on a sermon by Cardinal Newman
- Fri** **Friday of the Twentieth Week in Ordinary Time**
25 **How Conversion to the Lord Works**
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- Sat** **Memorial of Our Lady**
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A reflection taken from Journeying With the Lord
by Carlo Cardinal Martini



OUR NEED FOR CONVERSION

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard

God has called me and I will answer. God promises to be with me in troubles and rescue me. I will trust. Clearly, God wants to make a covenant of peace with each and all of us. It is a covenant of compassion and mercy. God doesn't say that because we have been worthy or just or upright we will be saved. God says that when we call He will answer. To God's ears a simply desire is as good as a shout. God doesn't look at appearances but at the heart and that is where our cry must come from.

It is the greatness of our need that compels us to cry to God. How do we know that our God is with us in tribulation? Because he has promised to be. Indeed, God promises to be with us every single day until the end of the world. But are we with God as God is with us? How do you understand being with God? My sons, let us call out to Heaven trusting our God will take pity on us. We call out because under heaven there is much effort but also much grief and affliction of spirit. The law of sin dwells in us and our hearts fail. We think of all the powers arrayed against us and wonder how we can hope for any comfort. If our heart calls to God it is with God.

If you look around your earthly dwelling, your corruptible body seems to weigh you down. So you have to seek above, for we know every excellent and perfect gift comes from above. We know that spiritual robbers lie in wait for the unwary, so we have to pass by everything that would turn us away from God. Leave all you have, as Joseph left his garment to flee from his master's wife when she wanted to lead him into sin. It is enough that God spares our life and we don't need any thing else. This is how we cry out to God from our heart.

Surely, when Christ, our life, appears we shall be free. But he must remain hidden until the time appointed by God. So we must cry out to be freed from all that would come between us and our Lord and Savior. We have to lift up our hearts, yes and lift up even our desires and our way of life and our determination to walk in God's way. And we have to let God teach us from above what we can hope for.

We cry out to Heaven and ask that we be heard and that our Father who is in Heaven will send us help from the Heavenly Zion. Yes, we trust God will send help in tribulation no matter what it is. God will rescue us and will finally glorify us in the resurrection. These are among the great things that God has promised. We live because of God's promises. We dare to say: "If we cry out with a godly heart, then surely you must keep your promise!" Can you say "Amen" to that? That is conversion, turning to God because God has promised us resurrection and everlasting life. Indeed, we have been promised God's very self and love. Our conversion requires that we trust these promises every day and every hour. At all times we "turn to God". That is the heart of the monastic way of life. In every circumstance and at every moment we turn to God in trust. We begin again right now.

HOW THE LORD FEEDS OUR LOVE

A reflection highlighted by a sermon by Thomas of Villanova

The Gospel this past Sunday told us the story of a Canaanite woman who sought healing for her daughter and received the gift of humility over and above this. She received a new life in the Holy Spirit and faith. She hadn't seen Christ perform miracles but had heard only rumors. Yet God used them to give her a faith that transformed her life as well as obtaining healing for her daughter. Think of how little she received outwardly and of how much we have received. Yet her trust in obtaining what she needed from Jesus was so strong that she didn't fall silent when ignored nor give up when scorned. She cried out with incredible patience though he ignored her, though he pushed aside the interceding apostles, though he spoke harshly to her as she lay on the ground before him. No one was ever so discouraged so clearly. What can one say about her humility? Her humility and perseverance were beyond human ability.

Well, what about us? We go cold and even numb in spite of all the sacraments we have been given. Yet think of those who did not have the opportunities we have been given. Before St. Pius X invited all the faithful to approach the Eucharist frequently few received this gift of God. People did not think themselves worthy to receive the Lord's very self in the sacrament of his Body and Blood. Saint Pope Pius X saw that this was increasing the coldness and numbness of the faithful and preventing them from growing in Lord as God intends. So he called upon the entire Church to forsake a pastoral strategy that not only failed to inspire people to work harder in conforming their lives with that of Christ but actually made people think of God as unmerciful and unloving.

But how have we responded to this renewal? The Lord knows the gift given us in faith, just as the Lord knew the hidden faith God had placed in the heart of a Canaanite woman. She hadn't received an education in the truths of faith as the Jews of her time had. By posing an obstacle to the healing that love for her daughter sought, the Lord brought his gift of faith into the open and perfected it through humility and trust.

The Scriptures give us the story of that woman as an example and an encouragement. If our love has grown cold or our humility seemingly disappeared yet we see we are called to turn to God every time we are given the opportunity to receive the Lord in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. O sinner, do for yourself and your soul what that woman did for her daughter. Sin is a sickness worse than the one the girl suffered from. Run to the Lord, cry out, beg for God's help and compassion. Keep at it. Do what she did and you too will be freed, just as her little daughter was.

LEARNING LOVE FOR GOD & PRAYING FOR OUR DEAD

A reflection taken from a sermon by Fr. Karl Rahner

The fact that we still love our dead means that we are with them. But are they with us as well? They are silent and that makes us wonder. What does that silence mean? Think first of the fact that God too is silent, rather like the dead. Yet faith convinces us that God is with us. Certainly we love God even as we love our dead, even if they seem distant and silent. So we call out to God. Does God give our cries and our love a response we can make sense of? We long for signs of his love and presence. Yes, but we can't complain about the silence of the dead because perhaps it is only an echo of God's silence. If we listen to this silence of God then we can begin to grasp its meaning. In fact, we come to see that its meaning surpasses our ability to understand rather than indicating an absence of God or a lack of response by God or our dead to our prayers and love.

God's silence is a kind of boundless space without which our love couldn't produce the act of faith. And that is at love's heart. God veils the divine love in the stillness that seems silence so that our love might reveal in faith what it really is. What is love without faith? God has apparently forsaken us so that we might find the One We Love and know we love God precisely in experiencing faith and loyalty. If God's presence in our midst were obvious what could our search for him find? It would find, I think, only ourselves for what is obvious needn't be sought. To love the still and silent we have to go out of ourselves, and in a special way. Only if we go out of self do we find the one we love. God is really different from us.

God's love, for instance, is infinite. It dwells only in God's own infinity. We are finite. So God's love is hidden from us just because we can't experience its infinity. So God calls us out of ourselves and into the divine infinity. Our faith is, in effect, a dark road traversed in a dark night as we go out of the houses that are our finite lives, lives filled with dimly lit rooms. We go toward the blinding light of eternal divine life. God's silence is nothing but the earthly appearance of the eternal word of infinite love. Our dead have entered into that light and want to share it with us. Precisely as they share it they come to us in God's stillness and silence.

We believe that life is never taken away from those who depart from this earth because they enter into God's love. And that changes their lives so life becomes eternal, measureless, superabundant. It is the inaccessible light of God that they have entered. The more they become like God the more what they so want to share with us seem like God's very silence. That calls forth our faith, the gift by which God is leading us into the same light that our dead know. They are with us even as God is with us, and they are with us in a way that draws us into faith, which is the key that opens us to everlasting love.

TRIALS AND TRANSFORMATION

A reflection based on a Letter of St. Rose of Lima to a doctor

Our Lord and Savior has spoken with incomparable majesty to us. He says that all must know that grace follows upon trials. Without bearing the burden of trials no one reaches the heights to which grace raises us. The gifts of grace increase just as the struggles increase. We must not deceive ourselves in this matter. The only reliable stairway to paradise is the cross. Without it there is no road that leads to Heaven.

While I was listening to this message a kind of power came over me and I seemed to have been set in the middle of a public street so that I might repeat the message to people of every age, sex and status. I wanted to cry out: "Hear, Oh people, Oh nations! I am warning you of the commandment of Christ by using the words that came from his own mouth: We cannot obtain grace unless we suffer afflictions. We must even heap trouble upon trouble to attain a deep participation in the divine nature, the glory of the sons of God and the perfect happiness of the soul."

That same power urged me to proclaim the beauty of divine grace. It was so strong that I could hardly breathe and I began to sweat and to pant. I felt as if my soul could no longer be confined to my body, but that I had burst apart some sort of chain and was free in a new way and even alone. I was moving very fast across the entire world and proclaiming this message.

If only we mortals would learn how wonderful, how great a thing it is, to have divine grace. It is so beautiful, so noble, so precious in every way! How great are the riches that this grace conceals within itself and how many are the delights and joys that it gives. If people only knew this and without doubt they would dedicate themselves and all their care and concern to winning for themselves those pains and afflictions that come with seeking God. Everyone, throughout the whole world, would seek trouble, infirmities and even torments—and seek them rather than good fortune. It is worth it to attain the immeasurable treasure of God's grace.

This is the reward and the ultimate gain of patience! With it no one complains about a cross or about troubles or whatever may happen to one. No one would complain if they knew anything about the scales on which all crosses are weighted when they are distributed to us. God's gifts are so immeasurably greater than any trial! Let us seek God and seek to bear the cross with Jesus more than we seek anything else. What we are talking about are the means by which the Lord transforms us and makes us more and more like Jesus Christ.

THE WISDOM OF THE GUILELESS

A reflection based on a sermon by Cardinal Newman

When Jesus met St. Nathaniel, commonly known as St. Bartholomew, he said: Here is an Israelite without guile! Being without guile is a kind of innocence and that fact helps us realize that this virtue and character is not found only among the poor or lowly or uneducated. Even the learned may have this beauty and it may be found in the courts of kings and the lecture halls of philosophers.

Think of the fact that the Lord's apostles were subjected to all the uproars and agitations of the world and they were often disappointed and even perhaps thwarted in their works. They lived in anxiety and at times lost their honesty. Yet all this did not prevent them from learning guilelessness, if they would. Indeed, guileless persons are members of society and yet for just that reason need to become guileless, innocent, and not deceitful. Perhaps they need this virtue all the more just for that reason.

The guileless person possesses an inner strength because certain values and ideals are held clearly and are related to a central, life shaping dedication—in this case dedication to God. Such people live above the world and so triumph over it, even if it should destroy them at some point. Theirs is the blessedness of the innocent. Innocence is not naïveté or ignorance but a steadfastness in doing good and seeking to do good. They have never given way to evil or formed habits of sin and so haven't directly experienced the power and misery of sin. They are able to discern the right and the wrong in the field of the values to which they are committed.

But more is requisite for the Christian, more even than the guilelessness of Bartholomew. When Christ sent him forth with his brethren into the world He said, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be therefore as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves". Innocence must be joined to prudence, discretion, self-command, gravity, patience, and perseverance in well-doing, as doubtless Bartholomew learned in due season under the Lord's guidance and teaching. Innocence is a beginning.

We pray to God to fulfill in us his work of goodness and of faith with power. May it please God to bring us forward to face great trials, as did the Apostles. May we not be taken by surprise, but make of the qualities of innocence and guilelessness the preparation for following the Lord even to the Cross. The clarity of values and the steadiness of dedication to God that helped one live guilelessly prepare us for our heavenly homeland.

HOW ONE IS CONVERTED TO THE LORD

A reflection extracted from a sermon by St. Bernard

Turn to me with all your heart, says the Lord. Rend your hearts and not your garments! What does the Lord mean? He has a secret he entrusts only to his friends. *“Unless you turn and become like a little child you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”* A little child is meek of heart.

O human creatures, why are you puffed up? The Lord is lofty and his greatness can be praised but not imitated. So be humble. This is the law of holiness. See how ruthlessly people jostle and trample each other; they would without shame crawl to get to the heights they seek. Those who are in competition to surpass a neighbor encounters many trials, have many rivals, and suffers from many who oppose those foolish goals they strive after. Yet nothing is easier than to humble oneself. And so the Lord says to us “turn to me” and gives us the example of a little child.

If this were an outward turning we could do it immediately, but it is an inward turning of the heart that we can scarcely accomplish in a life time. Unhappy the person who spends life with things outside, ignorant of the inner self. One’s tonsure may remain but not good habits. One keeps the rule of fasting but with a heart that is far from the Lord. Look carefully at the objects of your love, of your fear, and the reason for your joys and sadness, lest you find a worldly mind under your religious garb and a wayward heart under clothes that signify conversion. So let our love be turned to the Lord and let your fear too be turned to God and let both our joy and sadness be turned in the same direction. What could be more perverse than to rejoice when you do evil and to exult in what is wicked? If you grieve for your sins or your neighbor’s you do well. Rejoice, then, with your companions in the love of the Lord and of Jesus Christ.

Of course, we don’t value a physical turning in a small way, for it is no small support to the spiritual turning. The Lord asks you to give all your heart, and adds *“with fasting, with weeping and with mourning”*. Nor do we have sufficient craving for the joys to come if we do not beg for them every day and even in physical practices.

David was found by God to feel and think and act *“after the Lord’s own heart”*. Let us rend our hearts, then, and leave our outer garments whole. Our true garments are our virtues—love, obedience, love of neighbor. Love covers a multitude of sins. From it also comes perseverance. If your heart is wicked then rend it by compassion. Isn’t an ulcer rent open so the diseased matter will flow out? Isn’t the heart rent so it will overflow in compassion? Both are expedient so that we don’t let the poison of sin lie hidden within and so that we never shut off compassion from our neighbor’s need. Thus we will receive mercy from Our Lord Jesus Christ, today and always.

HOW MARY'S LIFE INSPIRES US

A reflection from Journeying With the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Not far from the Garden of Gethsemane, near the church of St. Anne, the mystery of the Madonna's birth is venerated. A few yards away, on the Temple Mount, we find a spot where the mystery of her presentation is commemorated. And beyond Jerusalem, in the hill country to the west, the mystery of her visitation to Elizabeth is recalled. Across the road from the Garden of Gethsemane we venerate the mystery of Mary's death and Assumption into Heaven. Thus we contemplate all the mysteries, the sufferings, the glory and the Resurrection of Jesus with Mary.

The Book of Revelation (11: 19, 12: 1-6) provides us with a curious synthesis, not always easy to explain, of the mystery of the Church as a participation in the mysteries of Jesus. And so when we remember Mary we remember too the mystery of the Church dying and rising with Christ. We celebrate the mystery of our life and our communities which are equally called to share in the mystery of Christ with Mary.

I invite everyone to ask for the grace that our Church be like Mary. May it be a Church which reflects Jesus, which is entirely related to Him, which has no meaning in itself except for its relationship to Him and which, therefore, manifests Him and lives Him.

And let us ask too for each of us the experience of this same mystery in our own lives. It is a mystery of combat and of struggle. In fact, the Book of Revelation speaks of a mysterious struggle. To be with Christ, to be in the Church, means combat. An easy existence is not promised or foretold.

To be with the Lord in his victory over death also means to be together with Mary in all the humble and joyous services which she renders to our humanity. Think of Lourdes, of Fatima, of all the places in which the Madonna has appeared to assure us that she continues to be near the daily life of the Church and brings Christ with her. The place where we are now is, so to speak, the source of all the other Marian presences as our honor and love for her in Christ shows them to others. Because Mary is alive in Christ she can show and manifest herself to human history and we can imitate her.